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Nature of the Atonement.

A

DISCOURSE

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ADVERTISEMENT.

This discourse was delivered to an audience composed chiefly of theological students, and was designed to aid them in forming their opinions on the important subject discussed. For their benefit, as well as at their desire and expense, it is now made public. In preparing it for the press, the writer at first intended to have assigned to the appendix a greater portion of the discussion, and to have retained at least all the practical reflections embodied in the original sermon. But he soon found that this course would swell the publication too much, and would cost him more time than could be spared from his other duties. He therefore changed his plan, omitted much that was merely practical and enlarged the discussion in the body of the sermon, and subjoined only a few articles by way of appendix. As it has thus assumed very much the character of a theological tract, some references and quotations have been annexed, which can be of no use to the public at large; but which, it is hoped, will be of value to those for whom they were intended.

SERMON.

Rom. iii. 25, 26.

"WHOM GOD HATH SET FORTH TO BE A PROPITIATION, THROUGH FAITH IN HIS BLOOD, TO DECLARE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS THAT ARE PAST, THROUGH THE FORBEARANCE OF GOD; TO DECLARE, I SAY, AT THIS TIME HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS: THAT HE MIGHT BE JUST, AND THE JUSTIFIER OF HIM WHICH BELIEVETH IN JESUS."

THE great question, the question of deepest interest—to us, and to all men,—is, on what conditions will God be propitious to us? In other words, how may we obtain forgiveness of our sins and the everlasting favour of God? What will he accept as an atonement for our transgressions? What can restore that harmony between him and us, which has been interrupted by the apostacy of our first parents and our own criminal deeds, and which must be restored, or we must be forever miserable?—This is a question which presses heavily on the soul of every man, when he looks forward with anxiety to the grave and to the world that lies beyond it. And to answer this question, is the grand problem in the religion of every age and country.—From the nature of the question, it is obvious that *reason* alone

can never answer it. An offended God will make his own terms: and who can tell what they will be, till he reveals them?*—To give us information on this subject, and information on which we may rely, is the chief object of the christian revelation. As it contains the most satisfactory declarations, and especially as it assures us that God will bestow free pardon and everlasting bliss on all who repent and believe in Jesus Christ; this revelation is justly denominated the Gospel, the glad tidings from heaven. Yet, full and explicit as the scriptures are on this subject, they do not enable us to understand it perfectly. Many questions may be asked which it would be difficult, and some which it would be impossible to answer. Who, for instance, can comprehend the mysterious union of natures in the person of the Mediator? Who can tell all the bearings and influences of his obedience and death? Who can be certain that he knows all the obstacles which were to be removed, before a free pardon could be consistently extended to sinful men? Or who will presume that he understands all the effects of the work of redemption, in the great system of the universe? It is easy to see, that a finite human mind can but imperfectly comprehend the designs and procedure of God in the moral, as well as in the natural world. Still, information sufficient to answer all practical purposes, we may presume, is given us. For the attainment of salvation, it may be sufficient

* See *Brettschneider's* Handbuch der Dogmatik. 2ter Theil. § 158. S. 272 ff. and *M. F. G. Süskind* über die Möglichkeit der Strafen—Aufhebung oder der Sünden—Vergebung, nach Principien der practischen Vernunft, in *Flatt's* Magazin. 1ter Stuck. S. 1—67. Tubing. 1796, and *Butler's* Analogy, Pt. II. chap. 3, 4, 5, particularly chap. 5, pp. 281—287. ed. Boston, 1809.

that we know and believe firmly the simple fact, that there is forgiveness with God, for the penitent believer, on account of something which Christ has done or suffered. Not much beyond this, have the knowledge and the faith of the great body of christians, in every age, extended. Yet on a subject of so much interest,—a subject into which angels look with eager curiosity, and which is to be the theme of the redeemed to eternity,—more knowledge certainly is desirable. It may contribute to the establishment of our faith, to the correction of our sentiments and the enlargement of our knowledge, on other points in theology; and may afford us interesting subjects for devout meditation. No work of God equally displays the depth of the divine wisdom and goodness; none seems more worthy to engage all the powers of the human mind.—On few points in theology, has the christian church made greater progress in knowledge. From the days of the earliest fathers to Martin Luther, there was a gradual though not very rapid advance. The reformers cast much light on the subject. From that time, the adversaries of the doctrines of grace have, with eagle eyes, detected errors and mistakes in the writings of the reformers and their successors. Within the last fifty years, the subject has undergone a more full discussion than ever; and the advance in knowledge has, I conceive, been answerable to the efforts made. One fact is noticeable, and demands our gratitude to the Author of all light: the believers in gratuitous justification, both in Europe and America, seem to be gradually coming to nearly the same conclusions.*

With a view to exhibit the results, to which my own mind has been led, and especially in regard to the na-

* See Appendix, A.

ture and the proximate effects of the atonement, I shall now direct your attention to the passage of scripture prefixed to this discourse.

In this text, Paul declares, explicitly, what was the immediate *object* of Christ's atoning sacrifice ;—that is, what effect it had in the economy of redemption, or how it laid a proper foundation for the pardon and the salvation of sinful men.—It was the immediate object of this sacrifice, *to declare* the righteousness of God: in other words, to display and vindicate the perfect holiness and uprightness of his character as a moral governor. This display being made, he can with propriety forgive all that believe in Jesus.—As this sentiment is the foundation of my whole discourse, I shall take some pains to shew that it is really contained in the text.

The Apostle is here treating, professedly, on the doctrine of justification by grace through the atonement made by Jesus Christ. And he uses, in the text, no figurative terms, and no comparisons or allusions, which might mislead us. He appears to aim at stating the simple truth, and in the most direct and appropriate terms. The plain, direct meaning of his words, therefore, taking them throughout in their most obvious sense, is their true meaning. Keeping these things in view, let us now enter the sanctuary of this text, and survey the objects it contains.* "God hath *set forth*,"—*προεθετο*—

* For the sake of those who may wish to see the words of the original in their connexion, the whole text is here given. Verse 25. *Ον προεθετο ὁ θεος ἱλαστηριον δια της πιστεως εν τῳ αυτου αἱματι, εις ενδειξιν της δικαιοσυνης αὐτου, δια την παρεσιν των προγεγονοτων ἁμαρτηματων εν τῃ ανοχῃ του θεου·* verse 26. *προς ενδειξιν της δικαιοσυνης αὐτου εν τῳ νυν καιρῳ, εις το ειναι αυτον δικαιον, και δικαιουντα τον εκ πιστεως Ιησου.*

hath *exposed* to view, as an object which is brought forth and exhibited to public inspection. "God hath set forth his Son *a propitiation*,"—*ἱλαστηριον, a propitiatory sacrifice* or *victim*;—not a *mercy-seat* or covering for the ark, as some have understood it.*—"Through faith in his blood:" that is, the benefits of which sacrifice, men obtain by trusting in it.—God hath done this "*to declare his righteousness.*" This propitiatory sacrifice was intended,—*εις ενδειξιν*, or as afterwards expressed, *προς ενδειξιν*,—for *a display, exhibition* or *manifestation*: and the thing to be displayed or exhibited, was *the righteousness* of God,—*της δικαιοσυνης αὐτου*,—that is, the rectitude of his views and proceedings as the moral governor of the universe.†

Some suppose the righteousness of God to denote here, not one of the divine attributes, but that righteousness which God accepts and makes the ground of a sinner's justification; or what had just before been denominated "the righteousness of God without the law," and "the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ."‡—But this would be supposing the righteousness of God to be nothing different from the propitiation itself; between which two things, the text makes the same distinction as between *the means* employed, and

* See *Wolfii* Curae Philol. in loc. *Magee* on Aton. and Sacr. p. 130. Novum Test. Gr. *à Koppe;* and *Rosenmüller* in locum.

† By the words *rectitude* and *righteousness*, here and throughout the discourse, I intend what is called *general* or *mixed justice;* which is to be carefully distinguished from *particular* or *simple justice.* See a full account of the distinction, in the Appendix B.

‡ See *Whitby*, in loc. and Discourse on Imputation, in his Com. on N. T. vol. II. p. 228.

the effect produced. The propitiation was intended for an exhibition, or, it was an exhibition, of the righteousness of God. That which is employed solely as the means of exhibiting something else which we wish to display, cannot be the very thing displayed. To bear the meaning contended for, the text should read: Whom God hath set forth as a propitiation, that is, *hath caused to become* his righteousness.

Again; some contend that δικαιοσυνη should here be rendered *benignity*, *kindness* or *compassion*. And the word δικαιος, translated *just*, in the next verse, they would have signify *merciful*, *gracious*, *compassionate*.*—That a very few passages are to be found, in which the sense would be preserved, and perhaps be expressed more definitely, by rendering these Greek words in this manner, I will admit. It is no uncommon thing for words of a general import, as these are, to be used occasionally instead of more limited terms. But this occasional usage of words in an improper and peculiar sense, does not prevent them from having what may be called their ordinary and their appropriate meaning; that is, a meaning which is always to be given them, when no reasons appear to forbid it. Precisely such is the case before us. These Greek words, ordinarily and appropriately, express the same ideas as our English words *righteousness* and *righteous;* and no philological reason forbids their having this meaning here. Those who contend for rendering them compassion and compassionate, offer no reasons drawn from the connexion, the

* See *Hammond*, *Rosenmüller* and *Koppe*, in loc. and *Schleusneri* Lex. N. T. *Ενδειξις*, no. 1. and *Δικαιος*, no. 4.

course of thought, or parallel passages. They merely adduce proof that there are a few passages, in which the words seem to have these peculiar meanings; and then add, that they would give a sense more agreeable to them, if so rendered here. Such arguments need no confutation.—But I have other reasons for rejecting this interpretation. Is it reasonable to suppose the Son of God became incarnate, and suffered and died on the cross, merely to evince that God is a being of compassion?—Was there no other way, in which our heavenly father could convince us that he is kind and gracious? Besides, of what use could it be, for him to demonstrate this attribute in such a way, when he was about to give us proof much more unequivocal by the actual offer of pardon for all our sins and everlasting blessedness? There could certainly be no atoning efficacy in the exhibition of this attribute. It could remove no obstacle to mercy, nor lay any proper foundation for the offer of pardon to the penitent. Yet the text supposes the display of the attribute intended by the Apostle, actually to remove some obstacles; and to enable God to be at the same time what that attribute implies, and the justifier of believers. For he made a display of that attribute, (εις το ειναι αυτον) *in order that he might be*, both δικαιος and *the justifier* of men.*—And this is implied also in the

* Overlooking the force of εις το ειναι αυτον, and supposing the text not to point our attention to that in the mediation of Christ which constitutes its value and efficiency, but merely to state the general facts, that salvation is to us altogether gratuitous, and that it comes to us through the atonement of Christ; some believers in the efficiency of the atonement, have reasoned thus: as it was the mercy of God which led him to seek our salvation, and as salvation is to us a free gift, it accords

word propitiation. God set forth his Son to be a propitiatory offering for the manifestation of this attribute, so that he could afterwards justify believers. Now is a propitiatory offering, one which is presented to God, to prove him already inclined to mercy, or to make him so? Is it the token and pledge of forgiveness, or the cause and ground of it? If, with some modern writers, we could believe that the atonement made by Jesus Christ, is, not the meritorious ground of justification, but merely a tragic scene, intended to affect us and bring us to repentance, and if we could discover the necessity and the propriety of so strange a procedure; then, indeed, we might suppose God to have set forth his Son as a kind of propitiatory offering to men;—and for the purpose of shewing his compassion for them. One insuperable difficulty, however, would yet remain; which is, that it was to enable God to have mercy on *believers*, not on others, that an atonement was necessary.—But suppose all these difficulties to be surmounted, there is still another objection of a more philological character, arising from the copulative conjunction in the expression, "*just and the justifier*," *δικαιον και δικαιουντα*. Justification, it must be admitted, is of grace. Now by retaining the common translation of *δικαιος*, we have this lucid

with the scope of the passage to render *δικαιοσυνη benignity*. —The answer is, that salvation by Jesus Christ does not originate from simple mercy on the part of God; but from mercy combined with a proper regard to the interests of the universe.—It is therefore not mere *mercy*, but *righteousness*, or what is called general justice, that is displayed in this scheme of salvation. And as the display of this attribute is that which gives to the atonement its value or efficacy; it is subversive of the whole meaning of the passage to render the word *δικαιοσυνη benignity*.

meaning of the clause, that he might be just, *and* at the same time, be merciful. But, translate *δικαιος merciful*, and what will be the sense?—that he might be merciful, *and* at the same time be merciful! And this senseless tautology, will be rendered still more insufferable if we suppose *δικαιοσυνη*, likewise, to signify *compassion*.

Having now shewn, I would hope satisfactorily, the import of the principal words of the text, I would call your attention to the general scope and connexion of the whole. You will recollect that this epistle was written within thirty years of the crucifixion; and that through all the preceding ages, God had shewn kindness towards such as trusted in his mercy. During four thousand years, he had, in the face of all his intelligent creatures, suspended the execution of justice. Numerous penitent sinners he had received to his bosom, and elevated to mansions above; while, during this long period, no atonement had been made, and no satisfactory ground appeared, to justify a procedure so contrary to the principles of distributive justice and to his own solemn declarations in the law. At length the Saviour had appeared, the atonement was made,—and light now beamed on the hitherto mysterious conduct of the righteous God.—Of this Saviour the text says: Him hath God set forth, as a propitiatory sacrifice, through faith in his blood, for an exhibition of his own righteousness, in regard to the remission of sins committed in the past ages, through the merciful forbearance of God. This propitiatory sacrifice was, I say, intended for an exhibition, in this age of the world, of his own righteousness; so that he might be, and might now be seen to be, a righteous

moral governor, and at the same time be the justifier of all that believe in Jesus Christ.*

I will now turn from a discussion of the text, to a discussion of the subject itself.—Why was an atonement necessary? What were the objects to be accomplished by it? And how did the mediation of Christ effect these objects? These are the principal questions to be answered. I shall, however, begin with another :—what are the reasons which either induce or require God to inflict any punishment whatever on transgressors? To this I answer :

In the first place, there is a real difference between right actions and wrong ones, between virtue and vice, or sin and holiness. The former are lovely, and meritorious; the latter are unlovely, and of ill-desert. Every being who has a conscience, feels that there is this difference. No man holds all actions to be equally praiseworthy : and no being, whose moral sensibility is acute, can fail to make a broad distinction, in point of merit, between that person who performs all his duties to himself, to his fellow creatures and to his God, and the person who is destitute of every virtue, and abandoned to every species of vice and crime. Now this distinction,

* Instead of giving a list of the numerous commentators and others who construe this text substantially in the manner here exhibited, I will refer only to such of them as confirm or illustrate their interpretation by important remarks. *Grotius*, Defensio Fidei Cath. in Opp. tom. III. p. 303. *G. C. Storr*, Opuscula Academ. Vol. II. p. 190, and Ueber den Zweck des Todes Jesu, subjoined to his Brief an die Hebräer, S. 553 ff. *Döderlein*, Instit. Theol. Christ. II. p. 448. *Veysie's* Bampton Lectures, p. 218 f. *Nares*, Remarks on the Version of N. T. pp. 154—162. *Magee*, on Aton. and Sacr. pp. 127, 261—263. Connect. Ev. Mag. for 1805, vol. VII. p. 161 f. *Burge*, Essay on Aton. pp. 29, 30.

which even we can see and feel in some degree, the holy God must be supposed to see and feel far more strongly than we do. If then, we look upon some deeds with abhorrence, and on the perpetrators of them with indignation ; while certain other actions we admire, and esteem and honour those who perform them ; much more, must we suppose the infinite and holy God to have such feelings. From his very nature, therefore, or from his perfect purity and intelligence, we suppose him inclined to make a wide difference between the virtuous and the vicious, between those who do such things as please him, and those who do such things as he abhors. This, doubtless, is one reason why he rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked.

A second reason why God should do this, is, that the good order and the happiness of his kingdom require it. The righteous obey, and the wicked transgress, those laws which his wisdom and goodness have ordained. On the observance of these laws, the order and the happiness of his vast kingdom, and of every part of it, depend. And hence, as the moral governor of the intelligent universe, as the being to whom it belongs to guard the interests of this vast community,—not by physical force, which would destroy the freedom of action, but by motives suited to affect the minds of rational and moral beings,—he must, necessarily, make a distinction between the righteous and the wicked ; that is, he must reward the one and punish the other. He would not otherwise do right : he would not distribute justice ; nor manifest a due regard to the interests of his great kingdom. He would not administer the government of it in a manner worthy of himself: his char-

acter, as a wise and righteous ruler, would be impeachable.—"That be far from thee,"—said Abraham, interceding for guilty Sodom,—"that be far from thee, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee; shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

The only other ground of punishment, which need be mentioned, is, thirdly, the personal benefit of the individuals who transgress. Some divine punishments, particularly those inflicted in this life, we may suppose to be fatherly chastisements, intended to reclaim the wandering, and thus promote their own best interests. Love or kindness to the individuals themselves, is the ground of these punishments.*

Such we may believe to be the principal reasons, why God punishes the wicked.—And which of them, except perhaps the last, can any man suppose so holy and unchangeable a being as God is, will ever cease to regard? Will the principles of his very nature ever be so changed, that he can cease to feel abhorrence of sin, and esteem for virtue? Or, will he ever become regardless of the duties of his station, as the universal governor, and cease to care for the order and happiness of his kingdom? Till he can do all this, he cannot cordially receive impenitent transgressors to his bosom, and treat them with that kindness which he shews to the righteous.

Of the three grounds of punishment just enumerated, the first is, in the nature of things, removeable in no other way than by a change of character either in God or

* See a lucid statement of the grounds of divine punishments, in *Brettschneider's* Handbuch der Dogm. B. I. S. 354 ff.

in the sinning creature. Nothing that a Mediator could do would remove it. The holy and unchangeable God can never cease to abhor sin. He must forever feel differently, and be inclined to conduct differently, towards the righteous and the wicked. Nothing can ever bring the infinite mind, which is purity itself, into harmony with the polluted souls of sinning creatures. They must become holy; this, and this only, can remove the first ground of punishment.—And this certainly will remove it; because when creatures cease to be sinners, they must cease to be odious in the sight of God. Their new and holy characters render them now lovely in his view; and he can therefore feel no repugnance, so far as their present characters are concerned, to embracing them as his dear children.—Such a change in the sinner's character, will likewise remove the third ground of punishment, which was the reformation of the sinner himself. Because this object is already obtained, by the change supposed.

Only the second ground of punishment then remains to be removed; and to remove this, and this only, is the proper business of an atonement. This is an obstacle to his forgiveness, which the sinner himself can never remove. He has committed deeds which cannot be recalled. He is a transgressor of the law, and must forever stand guilty. What is done, can never be undone. All he can do, will be to repent of the past, and cease to do evil in future. His repentance, though certainly proper, cannot change the nature of his past transgressions, nor repair the injury they have occasioned. And no future obedience can be more than his immediate duty for the time being; it can never atone or make

amends for past disobedience. He has violated the law of God; and nothing he can do or suffer, will obliterate his crime, or prevent its mischief to the kingdom of God. The good of the universe requires, that the majesty of the law be maintained inviolate; and this is impossible, let him do what he will, without the full execution of the penalty of the law upon him.

But, it may be said; do not all civil governments grant absolute pardons to the guilty? Why then, may not the divine government do the same? The answer is, because God's government is perfect; but all civil governments are imperfect. They are weak, and can but partially obtain their end. They sometimes give impunity to an accomplice in a crime, if he will bear testimony against his associates; because human governments often have no other sufficient means of detecting the guilty. They pardon a condemned criminal, because the judge erred in condemning him; or because the rigorous execution of the law would, in his case, exceed the demerits of his crime; or because the loss of such a citizen to the state, would be a greater evil to the community, than the suspension of the arm of justice. Such as these are the grounds, on which pardons in civil governments can be justified. They all originate from the imperfection of human laws, and from the incompetency of human beings to execute justice. But no such causes can exist in the perfect government of the omniscient God. He therefore, never grants absolute pardons. And in human governments, they tend so much to weaken the force of law and encourage transgression, that every wise lawgiver endeavours to render them as few and rare as possible.

Again; it may be said, parents and guardians, or heads of families and of schools, frequently remit punishment, when transgressors repent and reform. Why then, may not the great parent of all, do the same? The answer is, that the primary object of these family governments is the personal good of the individuals; and in such little communities, established chiefly for the benefit of the several members, the personal interest or advantage of each bears a higher proportion to the common good of the whole, than in a great empire. Hence, in these little societies, it is comparatively of less importance to support the honour and majesty of law at the expense of individual good. Yet, even here, some regard must be paid to the public good; and of course, to the claims of law. And in proportion to the extent of a community, or the number of subjects under the same government, must be the importance of fixed laws, and of an undeviating adherence to them. There is a difference even between a small family and a large one, and between a small school and a large one. The instructer of a single pupil, may pardon him, whenever it will not be injurious to the pupil himself; but if he has several pupils, it is far otherwise.—Hence it appears, that the principles and maxims of paternal governments are not to be transferred to the government of nations, and much less to that of worlds. But, has it not been already admitted, that God sometimes chastises his creatures, for their good? And does not this shew, that he adopts and acts upon, the principles of paternal governments?—Doubtless; to a certain extent he does. But how far?—is the question. The reasoning just advanced, goes to shew,—not that the personal advantage

of an individual is never regarded by the divine government,—but, that it bears a very small proportion to the public interests of God's immense kingdom; and therefore must often, very often, be sacrificed. It must never interfere with the greater good of the whole. According to the views heretofore given, so far as God punishes his creatures merely for the purpose of reforming them, he can and he does cease to punish when they are reclaimed. But so far as he punishes for the purpose of establishing and maintaining public law and public justice, individual advantage must give place to public good. Now the latter, rather than the former, must from the nature of the case, or from the extent of his empire and the immense importance of stable law and order in it, be the principal ground of punishment under the divine government. Indeed, all those retributions, which are to follow the general judgment, seem to belong to this class of punishments. At least, we have no evidence, that the fatherly chastisements of God ever extend beyond the state of trial, or the present life.

'Thus far we have been examining and attempting to ascertain, precisely, the nature of the difficulty which it was the business of the atonement to remove. The difficulty, it appears, consisted wholly in the second ground of punishment; that is, in the necessity of distributive justice to the wellbeing of the universe.

'To remove this difficulty, or to enable God righteously to pardon the repenting sinner; the atonement must give the same support to law, or must display as impressively the perfect holiness and justice of God, as the execution of the law on transgressors would. It must be something different from the execution of the law itself;

because it is to be a substitute for it, something which will render it safe and proper to suspend the regular course of distributive justice.—If such an expedient can be found, then an adequate atonement is possible; otherwise it is not.*

Now such an expedient, the text represents the sacrifice of Christ to be. It is "a declaration of the righteousness of God; so that he might be just,"—might secure the objects of distributive justice, as it becomes a righteous moral governor to do;—"and yet might justify," or acquit and exempt from punishment, him that believeth in Jesus. It was in the nature of it, an exhibition or proof—ἐνδειξις—of the righteousness of God. It did not consist in an execution of the law on any being whatever; for it was a substitute for an execution of it.—It did not annihilate the guilt of transgressors, or cause them to be either really or apparently innocent; for this was impossible: it rather proclaimed the atrocity of their guilt.—It did not fulfil the law, or satisfy its demands on transgressors; for then their acquittal would have been an act of justice, not of grace; and the atonement would have been but another mode of executing the law itself, not a substitute for it. Its immediate influence was not on the characters and relations of men as transgressors, nor on the claims of the law upon them. Its di-

* See *F. G. Süskind*, über die Möglichkeit der Straffen-Aufhebung oder der Sünden-Vergebung, in *Flatt's* Mag. für christ. Dogm. St. I. S. 1—68. and *C. G. Brettschneider's* Handbuch der Dogm. §. 158. Band II. S. 248—278. Also *Dr. J. Edwards*, Three Serm. in Selectt. on Atonement, pp. 330—337. *Dr. Maxcy's* discourse, ibid. pp. 206—208. *Dr. Smalley's* Sermon, ibid. pp. 112—114. *Dr. Griffin*, on the Extent of the Atonement, pp. 22—27. *Mr. Burge*, Essay on the script. doctr. of Atonement, pp. 39—66.

rect operation was on the feelings and the apprehensions of the beings at large, who are under the moral government of God. In two respects, it coincided precisely with a public execution of the law itself: its immediate influence was on the same persons; and that influence was produced in the same way,—by means of a public exhibition. For what is a public execution of the law on culprits, but a public exhibition? and an exhibition, which is intended to affect the feelings and the apprehensions of the community,—to impress them all with high respect and reverence for the law, that stern guardian of the public weal? The atonement to be a proper substitute for the execution of the law, ought to be a public exhibition; and such an exhibition, as would impress all the creatures of God with a deep and awful sense of the majesty and sanctity of his law, of the criminality of disobedience to it, and of the holy unbending rectitude of God as a moral governor.

And such, according to the text, the atonement really was. It was an exhibition or manifestation of the righteousness of God; and an exhibition of such a nature, as must strike every intelligent beholder with astonishment. It was a transaction, without a parallel in the history of the divine government. The son of God, the Lord of glory, himself descended to this lower world. He veiled his godhead in a human body, and humbled himself to dwell with men. He toiled and bore reproach, and suffered from pain and weariness and hunger. He condescended to instruct men, to be their physician, their friend, their very servant;—he washed his disciples' feet. He was obedient to every ordinance of God and man;—he fulfilled all righteousness. He suffered

himself to be reviled and persecuted, to be arraigned, condemned and crucified. He expired amidst the mockery of Jews, and the insults of a Roman soldiery.—That this was an astonishing exhibition, an exhibition calculated to fill the mind with wonder and amazement; every one feels instantly.—The only difficulty is to understand how this exhibition was a display of the righteousness of God. To solve it, some have resorted to the supposition that the Son of God became our *sponsor*, and satisfied the demands of the law on us, by suffering in our stead. But to this hypothesis there are strong objections. To suppose that Christ was really and truly *our sponsor*, and that he suffered in this character; would involve such a transfer of legal obligations and liabilities and merits, as is inadmissible: and to suppose any thing short of this, will not explain the difficulty. For if, while we call him a sponsor, we deny that he was legally holden or responsible for us, and liable in equity to suffer in our stead; we assign no intelligible reason, why his sufferings should avail any thing for our benefit, or display at all the righteousness of God.—Besides, this hypothesis,—like all the others, which suppose the Son of God to have first entered into a close, legal connexion with sinful men, and afterwards to have redeemed them,—would make the atonement to be a legal satisfaction for sin; and then the acquittal of the sinner would be no pardon at all, but would follow in the regular course of law.—We must, therefore, resort to some other solution. And what is more simple, and at the same time satisfactory, than that which is suggested by the text? The atonement was an *exhibition* or *display*. That is, it was a *symbolical transaction*. It was a transaction, in

which God and his Son were the actors; and they acted in perfect harmony, though performing different parts in the august drama. The Son in particular, passed voluntarily through various scenes of humiliation and sorrow and suffering; while the Father looked on with all that tenderness and deep concern, which he—and none but he—could feel. The object of both, in this affecting tragedy, was to make an impression on the minds of rational beings every where, and to the end of time. And the impression to be made, was, that God is a holy and righteous God; that while inclined to mercy, he cannot forget the demands of justice, and the danger to his kingdom from the pardon of the guilty; that he must shew his feelings on this subject; and shew them so clearly and fully, that all his rational creatures shall feel that he honours his law while suspending its operation, as much as he would by the execution of it.

But how, it may be asked, are these things expressed or represented by this transaction. The answer is, —symbolically. The Son of God came down to our world, to do and to suffer what he did; not merely for the sake of doing those acts and enduring those sorrows, but for the sake of the impression to be made on the minds of all beholders, by his labouring and suffering in this manner. In this sense, it was a symbolical transaction. And the import or meaning of it, as of every other symbol, is to be learned either from the circumstances and occasion of it, or from the explanation that accompanies it. Hence all that either reason or revelation teaches, respecting the object of Christ's visit to our world, may properly be applied to the explanation

of this significant transaction.—Does any object, that viewed in this light, it is an obscure and unnatural symbol? I might ask the objector to shew the natural fitness of other symbols both human and divine, to express the import which is ascribed to them. Words, for instance, are symbols of human thoughts and emotions. But what is there in the nature of articulate sounds, to make them significant of the thoughts and emotions of the soul? or to make each word significant of one particular thought, rather than another? The only answer here, is that men have agreed to use certain sounds as symbols of certain thoughts; and thence it is, they have acquired a meaning. In the same way, the common symbolical actions acquire a definite meaning. Why does inclining the body forward express respect? or falling on the knees betoken supplication? These actions would not have such definite meanings, if men had not agreed to use them for such purposes. Yet who does not now, understand and feel their import? Take an example. A child commits a fault; and is required, in token of his repentance, to fall upon his knees and ask forgiveness. He does so; and the parent is satisfied; and all the family sympathize with the offender, and feel that he may now properly be forgiven.—But these, it may be said, are well known symbols. True; yet all their significancy, or at least their definite import, originates from the arbitrary pleasure of those who introduced them and gave them currency. And in the numerous symbols of divine appointment, there was the same indefiniteness of meaning, the same natural unfitness to convey precise notions to the mind, till God by a sovereign act declared what meaning

should be assigned them. This is true of the covenant of the rainbow, of sacrifices, circumcision, baptism, the Lord's supper,—indeed, of nearly all religious rites under both the old dispensation and the new.—Now if men regulate a great part of their intercourse, and convey to each other most of their thoughts and feelings and determinations, by arbitrary symbols; and if God has appointed various standing symbols, of the same character, to denote his pleasure or purposes, and to be expressive of the most solemn devotions of his creatures; may he not employ an extraordinary symbol, of like character, for the special purpose of shewing with what feelings and views he offers pardon to the penitent? Suppose we could discern no natural fitness in this symbol to convey to us any definite impressions; is not this true of most symbols?—But I venture to say, this symbol has a natural fitness for its object. Its primary object was not so much to enlighten the understanding, as to impress the feelings of creatures. A mere revelation, written or oral, might have been sufficient, if the former of these had been the object. Again, the feelings of creatures were to be impressed by an exhibition, not of the intellectual conceptions of the divine mind, but of the determinate purposes and the holy feelings of God. And, the impression to be made, was to be universal, and deep and lasting as eternity. Now the symbol chosen, was certainly calculated to make a deep and lasting impression on the minds of creatures. This all must admit. It was also of such a nature, as to exhibit uncommon strength of feeling and very great decision of mind, in regard to something, on the part of God the Father and his Son. Never did they perform

an act indicative of so intense desire and purpose, or one that seemed to involve so much selfdenial, so much painful effort. This symbol then, had all that is necessary in any symbol of emotion or purpose, to give it fitness for its object. As soon as the import of it is made known, it produces, and actually has produced, the effect designed. For the preaching of the cross, the mere statement of what Christ has done and suffered for the salvation of men, has impressed and converted all the nations which have been favoured with it. And the truly pious in all ages of the church, though differing greatly in their conceptions of the nature and operations of Christ's sacrifice, have united in admiring the wisdom of this plan of redemption. They have felt that it displayed,—though unable perhaps to tell how,—the righteousness as well as the goodness of God. It has actually led them to new and adoring views of the divine Being; and has caused them to feel, that this way of salvation exhibited to them the most constraining motives to forsake iniquity and return to the love and service of their Maker.

From this view of the nature of the atonement, arise several reflections of no small importance.

1. The efficiency, and of course the value, of the atonement made by Jesus Christ, is proportionate to the dignity of his character.—For his toils and sufferings were an exhibition, the object of which was to make a deep and lasting impression on the intelligent universe. They were intended to shew how solicitous God is to prevent his creatures from supposing him to make light of transgression, because he lets it go unpunished. Now the strength of the impression made by the exhibition,

is of vast importance; for it is the visible measure of the divine displeasure at sin. If the whole exhibition makes no deep and lasting impression, if it is viewed as an ordinary and trivial occurrence; it will be inefficient and useless, or perhaps worse than useless. It is only by being such an exhibition as will strike every beholder with astonishment and awe, such as will make an impression too deep ever to be forgotten, that it can answer effectually the ends of an atonement.—If now, we should suppose the Mediator to have been a mere man, an eminent prophet, perhaps; and that he endured and performed what the gospel relates;—what was there here, more than has often occurred? Is it a strange thing in our world, for good men to be persecuted and put to death? Were not many prophets and righteous men so treated by the ancient Jews? If then God has selected one of these common occurrences, and appointed it to be the special symbol of his concern for the honour of his law; what is gained by the symbol, that would not be gained, without it, by a mere declaration? Will this effectually secure reverence for his law, and impress transgressors with an awful sense of the holiness of God? Will it not rather encourage transgression, by seeming to prove that sin is quite a venial thing in God's account?—Let us next suppose, as some have supposed, that the Mediator was the highest and noblest created or derived being in the universe; but still, a creature, and therefore infinitely beneath the rank of God himself. Such an exalted being, we must suppose, would be very dear to God. Of course, for God to give him up to be reviled and spit upon and crucified, must shew that he regards the occasion which makes it necessary,

to be a very serious and important one. Because, for such a being to be given up to so great indignity and suffering, would be an extraordinary thing; and would betoken something of unusual occurrence in divine providence. But, as the sufferings of this exalted creature were temporary, and as he was raised to greater honours afterwards; he experienced perhaps no real loss. Viewed in itself, the transaction might be regarded as only one of the more uncommon of those mysterious events which occur in the providence of God. And when the object of it should be made known, the natural inference would be, that God felt it to be somewhat dangerous to suspend the course of justice towards transgressors, and was willing to take some pains to prevent the consequences. But still, if the honour of his law and the good order and happiness of his kingdom, when weighed in his balance, are equivalent only to such sufferings of such a creature; they are in his account but of limited value: and it is by no means certain, that he may not be induced by some consideration, and that not of infinite value neither, to sacrifice them altogether. Thus, such an atonement would fall short of declaring and evincing, fully, "the righteousness of God." It would not enable him to "be just," just to himself and to his kingdom, and yet to "justify the believer." Such an exhibition would fall far, very far, short of making as deep and lasting an impression on the inhabitants of both worlds, as would be produced by the execution of the sentence of the law upon transgressors. It would therefore be an inadequate atonement.—But, let us suppose now, that the Mediator was in dignity and power on a level with God the Father, and in an equal degree

possessed of all divine attributes ; and that he condescended to unite himself with a mortal man ; and in this state submitted to be reviled, and loaded with insults, and persecuted even unto death ; and we have an exhibition, at which the universe may justly stand amazed. It is needless to object, that it was only the human nature of the complex person, which suffered pain and death. It was so. But what could the infinite and impassible God do more ? He became personally united to an abused, suffering mortal, and thus bore a load of indignity heaped upon himself. The human mind can conceive of no exhibition calculated to produce a deeper impression. Of course, this appears to be the most efficacious atonement, the best substitute for the execution of the law, which it was possible for infinite wisdom to devise.

2. According to the view we have taken of the nature and design of the atonement, the justification of believers is not a justification founded on the principles of law and distributive justice. It is an *absolute pardon*, an act of *mere grace ;* and of grace on the part of God the Father, as well as on that of God the Son. For the operation of Christ's sacrifice, it appears, was not on the regular course of distributive justice in regard to individual transgressors. Its influence was on the public feeling respecting the character of God. And it only enabled God, with honour to himself and safety to his kingdom, to gratify the desires of his heart by the pardon of repenting sinners. Justification, therefore, is a real departure from the regular course of justice ; and such a departure from it, as leaves the claims of the law on the persons justified, forever unsatisfied. This is a legitimate inference from the principles which have

been advanced. And it is confirmed by the following considerations.

If the atonement causes transgressors to be justified on the principles of law and distributive justice, either it must change the principles of the law itself, or it must divest the transgressor of guilt and ill desert, or it must legally and fully satisfy the demands of the violated law upon him.—But the first is impossible. The law of God is founded on the eternal and immutable principles of distributive justice. It renders to every man according to his deserts. Till the distinction between right and wrong shall cease to exist, or the Omniscient cease to discern it and regard it; the principles of the divine law must remain unaltered. The atonement then did not change the law.—Neither did it divest the transgressor of his guilt and ill desert. It could neither recall the deeds he had committed, nor change their moral character, nor separate from him the guilt of them. It therefore could not make the transgressor to become really innocent. Nor did it "cover over" his sins, or conceal them and cause them to be overlooked and forgotten. For, the pardoned sinner not only remains, in fact, the same guilty creature he was before; but he is viewed and treated by his Maker, as personally guilty; and he must feel himself to be so, and ingenuously confess and mourn over his transgressions, in order to obtain forgiveness; and if received to mercy, he must forever adore and praise the abounding grace of God in his salvation. The atonement then, did not divest the transgressor of his guilt or ill desert.

Neither did it satisfy the demands of the violated law

upon him. For, what were the demands of the violated law? Not, that some transferable good should be surrendered and paid over to God or to the law, as being forfeited by the transgressor. The law did not ordain, that, in case we sinned, certain privileges or valuable possessions held by us, should be forfeited into the hands of another or to the public, who might sue for them and recover them. Had this been the case, the Mediator might, perhaps, have been able to pay the forfeiture, or something equivalent to it; and thus have virtually satisfied the law. But the law ordained no such thing. When transgressed, it requires no payment, no transfer of any thing whatever, to another. What then does it demand? That the sinner *himself* suffer the punishment, which it denounces. The violated law holds *him* personally guilty, and it requires that due punishment fall on *his* head, and on his only. For the law of God, as already observed, is founded on the principles of distributive justice, which renders to every one according to his deserts. It therefore, carefully discriminates between the innocent and the guilty; and it never suffers the distinction to be overlooked or forgotten. When once a creature becomes a transgressor of its commands or prohibitions, it never is satisfied, and never can be, with any thing short of the full execution of the threatened penalty on the transgressor himself.—And the same is true of criminal law in human governments. No judge can admit an innocent person to suffer an infamous or capital punishment, in place of the person found guilty. If a few rare instances of such a procedure can be gleaned from ancient history, they must be ascribed to the ignorance of the times: for

neither distributive justice nor the sound maxims of criminal law will vindicate them. Thus Zaleucus, the Locrian lawgiver, is said to have made a law that every adulterer should suffer the loss of both his eyes. Afterwards, his own son being found guilty, the story is, that the father caused one of his own eyes to be plucked out, and then one of his son's eyes. This was an expedient, which might serve very well to shew how much he revered the law, and his fear of lessening its authority. But it was not an execution of the law. The father's loss of an eye was not what the law demanded, nor any part of it. As a judge, Zaleucus could not legally decree it; nor would distributive justice tolerate it. A true description of this transaction would be, that the penalty of the law was in part remitted, through the clemency of the lawgiver, who voluntarily submitted himself to a great calamity, with the hope that it would cause the law to be respected, as much as the full execution of it.* And thus also the bloody sacrifice of the Mediator, was not what the law of God demanded, or could accept, as a legal satisfaction for our sins. All that it could do, was, to display the feelings of God in regard to his law; and to secure, by the impression it made, the public objects which would be gained by an execution of the law. It did not cancel any of the claims of the law on us. And hence, after the atonement was made, God was under no legal obligations to exempt any man from punishment. If he had never

* See *Valerius Maximus*, Exemp. Mem. L. vi. c. v. p. 557. ed. *Thysii*, 1655, whose reflection is; Ita debitum supplicii modum legi reddidit, æquitatis admirabili temperamento, se inter misericordem patrem et justum legislatorem partitus.

pardoned a single transgressor, neither the law nor distributive justice would have been contravened. And if he pardons at all, it is mere grace. Or to state it otherwise, the atonement was not of such a nature as to require God to pardon us, but it enables him to do it with credit to himself and safety to his kingdom.*

3. From this view of the atonement, it appears that there is no foundation for those controversies which have been raised, respecting the *extent* of the atonement. It has been debated whether Christ made atonement for the elect only, or for all men: and, whether his sacrifice procures for believers forgiveness merely, or all the other blessings likewise that are conferred upon them. These controversies arise from the supposition, that the atonement draws after it, by necessary consequence, the salvation or at least the pardon of all that believe. And they have given no little trouble to those who hold the doctrine of vicarious satisfaction, whether by the imputation of guilt or the transfer of punishment. On such a supposition, these controversies are of vast moment; and cannot be avoided. For, if the Redeemer made legal and proper satisfaction for the sins of any; it is a fair inquiry, and unavoidable too, for whose sins did he make satisfaction? And the answer must be, for the sins of all, or for the sins of a part only. So, if the atonement was, necessarily and inseparably, connected with the bestowment of blessings on believers; how far does this connexion extend? Does it reach to all the blessings which God now confers, or only to some part of them? But, if the views given in this discourse be correct, we may say to the disputants on both sides

* See the reference and note, which form Appendix C.

of these controversies, as the Saviour once to the Sadducees; ye do err, not knowing the scriptures; for the relation you both take for granted, has no existence.

4. The view we have taken of the nature of the atonement, may assist us in judging of the various systems and speculations in regard to what is called the matter of the atonement, or the effects produced respectively by the obedience and the sufferings of the Mediator. One tells us that the atonement consisted in suffering; another, that it consisted in obedience; and a third, that it consisted in both. According to some, Christ's sufferings procured us pardon, and his obedience procured us merit; and both together, complete salvation. According to others, his sufferings go to shield us from punishment, but all positive blessings are the free gift of God. One has told us, that Christ's obedience or virtue entitled *him* to a reward; and that, on the allowance of his claim, he insisted on liberty to dispose of us at his pleasure.* Many have supposed that his obedience, his holy character, was necessary to render his sufferings meritorious or efficient; but that, in itself, it had no atoning influence. The general opinion has been, that the sufferings of Christ constituted the atonement, or at least was the sole ground of our forgiveness.— Without developing farther the various opinions which have been entertained, or stopping to canvass particular hypotheses; I will observe, that if the view we have taken in this discourse of the nature of the atonement, be correct; it will throw much light over this whole subject, and shew that there is not ground for so many

* See an Essay on Redemption, by *John Balguy*, pp. 107, 8vo. 2d ed. 1785.

nice distinctions as some have made.—The atonement was not a legal or a forensic transaction. It was altogether extrajudicial, or out of the ordinary course of legal procedure. It was an expedient for avoiding a legal procedure in regard to believers. It was in its nature, simply a display or exhibition, intended to impress on all creatures a deep sense of "the righteousness of God" as a moral governor. Of course, any and every part of the exhibition, and every circumstance attending it,—every thing that Christ either did or suffered, from the time of his descent from heaven till his return thither,—had an atoning efficacy, so far as it contributed to render the exhibition as a whole more impressive. For the transaction operated as a whole, and was intended to produce one general effect. It is not then to be anatomized, and to have distinct offices assigned to its different members. Doubtless some scenes in that august tragedy, which occupied more than thirty years in the performance, were more impressive, and of course contributed more to the atonement, than others. The descent of the Son of God and his assumption of our natures, or the first opening scene of the tragedy, was very striking. His entrance on the arduous and benevolent work of a public teacher and a public benefactor, was a sublime scene. Various others, of much interest, followed rapidly. The plot thickened, and the whole assumed a deeper and deeper colouring, till the last awful scene, which displayed the Son of God nailed to a cross, in agony, unpitied, and bowing his head in death. This was certainly the most stupendous scene in the whole exhibition. It was so viewed by the apostles as well as by common christians; for it is most dwelt on

by them; and is often spoken of as if the whole atonement was concentrated in it. "The blood of Christ cleanseth:—We are reconciled to God by the death of his Son:—He redeemed us to God by his blood: He made his soul an offering for sin."—Yet doubtless his sufferings anterior to his crucifixion, the various "travails of his soul" while on earth, come into the atonement. Nor are his active labours excluded by the apostles. "By the *righteousness* of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification:—for as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners; so by the *obedience* of one shall many be made righteous."

5. The views exhibited in this discourse, may suggest to us some of the reasons why repentance and faith are required of those to be saved by Jesus Christ.

As the atonement has no effect upon our characters or deserts, but leaves us just as guilty and obnoxious to punishment as we were before; as it leaves the law in full force against us, and imposes no obligation on the Lawgiver to acquit and save us; but merely enables him to do it consistently with his own honour and with the public interests of his kingdom; it is evident, that God may now offer us salvation on what terms he shall think proper. And, I might add, he may offer it to *whom* he thinks proper, to a part or to all; for the atonement leaves us all equally without claims, and without hopes too, except from the mere mercy of God.—Now the terms he is pleased to state, are repentance and faith. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Repentance or reformation is required of us, not be-

cause it is any satisfaction for our past transgressions, or by itself an adequate ground of pardon; but because it is necessarily a part of the plan of salvation by grace, founded on the atonement. For, in the first place, the atonement removes only the second ground of punishment, which is the necessity of treating all creatures according to their personal merits, in order to preserve the influence of law and secure the tranquillity and happiness of the universe. The first and the third grounds of punishment, the atonement does not remove, or even touch. The settled abhorrence of all sin which the holy God cannot but feel, or the entire repugnance of his nature to the admission of depraved sinning creatures to an equal share in his affection and his favours with his obedient holy creatures, which was the first ground of punishment; no atonement could possibly remove. It can never be removed, but by the repentance of the sinning creature, by his becoming a holy and obedient child of God. So the third ground of punishment, or the reformation and moral improvement of the sinning creature; must remain of course, so long as the transgressor continues impenitent and unreformed. Now, as the atonement could not remove either of these grounds of punishment, or even weaken them in the slightest degree; repentance is just as necessary to salvation, as if there had never been an atonement made.—Again: from the character of God, as it is displayed by the atonement, it appears that it is his fixed purpose to preserve his kingdom pure, so far at least as it can be done by moral causes. This is a prime object of all his proceedings. How then can he, consistently with his designs, offer pardon to the inhabitants of a sinful world,

without insisting on their repentance? Evidently, he would frustrate his own purposes, if he should suffer his Son to become the minister of sin. When opportunity was presented him for bringing the most powerful of all motives for amendment, to bear on the minds of a whole race of fallen creatures, he would neglect it, and would leave them wholly to their own choice whether to be virtuous or vicious.—And further, such a procedure would greatly impair, if not entirely destroy, the efficacy of the atonement on his whole kingdom. For to offer pardon to transgressors, without insisting on their repentance, when it might so easily be done, and when it would be so likely to produce the best effects; would indicate very great indifference to sin. It would be an exhibition of character directly opposed to the exhibition made by the atonement; and would therefore powerfully counteract its efficacy. Thus to preserve the atonement unimpaired, to render it a safe and sufficient ground of pardon; the repentance, the entire reformation of the pardoned sinner must be peremptorily demanded.

Faith, the other condition of salvation, is a belief of the truths exhibited in the Gospel, and a reliance on the mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, for justification and eternal life.—Wherever the Gospel is preached, this is a suitable condition; not however, because faith has power to unite us to the Redeemer, in such a mysterious union as causes our guilt or punishment to be transferable to him, and his merits to pass back to us or to our account. For such a union is deemed impossible; nor is it supposed or required by the doctrine of the atonement.—But faith is properly made a condition

of salvation, because it implies a right temper and behaviour on the part of the person saved. It implies that he has enlightened and correct views of God, of Christ, of himself; and that he feels as one in his condition ought. It brings him upon his knees, as a suppliant before God. It causes him to humble himself, to acknowledge his guilt and ill desert, and to ask for pardon as a blessing of which he is utterly unworthy. It requires him publickly to honour the atonement, and so to do what he can to promote its salutary influence on the universe. It is such an act of entire submission, such a surrendry of himself and of all his interests into the hands of God, as at once removes all distance between him and his Maker, and lays a foundation for that cordial, affectionate intercourse in future between him and God, which it is the very object of redemption to produce.

APPENDIX, A.

Concise history of the doctrine of Atonement.

The fathers did not sufficiently discriminate between the means of *sanctification* and the grounds of *justification*. They considered Jesus Christ as their only deliverer both from sin itself and from its punishment. To obtain salvation, they supposed, much was required of them. Without defining precisely what they must themselves do, and what Christ had done, or would do for them; they seem to have regarded salvation as a whole, and as such they frequently ascribed it to different causes. The blood of Christ, the ransom he paid, and their faith in him and obedience to him, as well as baptism, alms, fasting, penance, prayer, and martyrdom,—all were spoken of in much the same terms, and not unfrequently represented as, severally, the ground of their entire salvation.

It was, however, the current opinion, from the end of the second century down to the reformation, that on a person's embracing and professing the christian religion by baptism, all his past sins were cancelled; and that, for the sins he might afterwards commit, he must suffer penance, give alms, fast and pray, unless he could atone for them all by martyrdom.

Whether God could have saved us in any other way than that described in the gospel, was a question on which the fathers were by no means agreed. *Basil*, *Ambrose*, and others, (on the authority of Ps. xlix. 8.) denied, while *Athanasius*, both the *Gregories*, *Theodoret*, *Augustine*, &c. affirmed it.

The death of Christ, they often considered in the light of a *sacrifice for sin*; and often too, in that of a *ransom* paid for the redemption of captives. They considered all men as having resigned themselves up willing slaves of the god of this world; who therefore had over them the rights of a conqueror over captives. To rescue them from this captivity, Christ paid his own life a ransom. Thus *Justin*, *Irenaeus*, *Clemens Alex.* *Tertullian*, *Origin*, *Basil*, &c. who maintained that the ransom was paid to the devil. Indeed this was the general opinion in the earlier ages. But *Gregory Naz.* *Augustine*, *Athanasius*, and *Ambrose*, held that the ransom was paid to God;—a sentiment which was generally held among the schoolmen.

From the fourth century onward, both natures of the Saviour were supposed to be concerned in the atonement.

The schoolmen were the first to give system to many doctrines of the bible. *Anselm*, in the 11th century, is regarded as laying the foundation of that scheme of the atonement which was adopted by the reformers. Some traces of similar opinions are to be found at an earlier period; but his book, entitled, *Cur Deus Homo?* first gave them form and currency. He maintained, that to sin is to rob God of the honour due to him; and that every sinner thus becomes a debtor to God; and an insolvent debtor, because, if he reforms, he can never perform in any given period more than the service due for that period. Hence a redeemer was necessary; who must be God as well as man, that he might pay more honour to God than could be demanded of him.—Jesus Christ was such a saviour. Taking our debt on himself, he cancelled it, by suffering the penalty of the law.—This theory soon became popular. *Thomas Aquinas* adopted it, and added, that the satisfaction made by Christ was superabundant, or more than was absolutely necessary; because, he being God, his sacrifice had infinite value, while men being finite their debt was so. The Dominicans and afterwards the Jesuits, embraced and defended this scheme. But *Duns Scotus*, *Occam*, the Nominalists and Franciscans, denied that Christ actually suffered the penalty of the law; and maintained that he endured only what God graciously accepted as equivalent to it.

Luther and the other reformers adopted this theory of Anselm, which they extended so as to make the atoning death of Christ a satisfaction to God for *all sins*, and not merely for sins committed before baptism. This modification was of vast moment, as it swept away all the schemes of personal merit which had been accumulating on the church for ages, and sent men to Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

Still the scheme had its difficulties. It exhibited God the Father, as unforgiving; it supposed a real transfer of guilt and merit; and it seemed to exonerate believers from all obligation to obey the law of God. Among the many who endeavoured to defend or to modify it, *Grotius* stands conspicuous. He taught that Christ made satisfaction, not to God, but to the *law;* the honour of which must be supported for the sake of the public good. Our guilt also, he conceived not to be transferred to Christ; but God, as a sovereign and law-

giver, relaxed the law, by allowing its *penalty* to be transferred to Christ. Thus the innocent suffered for the guilty; which, though contrary to distributive justice, was not wrong, since Christ consented to it, and the public good required it. This scheme with some modification, has extended over most protestant nations, and has nearly supplanted the theory of Anselm.

In this historical sketch, no notice is taken of the schemes which sink the atonement into a mere device for persuading and enabling men to repent, under the expectation that God will then forgive them. Some account of these schemes may be seen in *Brettschneiders'* Entwickelung, § 107. S. 612. and Handbuch d. Dogmatik. B. II. S. 323. also in *Magee*, on Atonement and Sacrifice.

I will here close this article with notices of the histories of this doctrine, which I have consulted, and from which the reader may obtain more full satisfaction.

1. *Grotius*, in his Defensio Fidei &c. in Op. tom. III. gives us ten folio pages of mere quotations from the Lat. and Gr. fathers and the schoolmen.

2. *J. F. Cotta*, Historia Doctrinae de Redemp. Eccles. in the 4th vol. of *J. Gerhardi* Loci Theol. p. 105—132. 4to. *This history extends from the birth of Christ to the middle of the last century; but is rather superficial.*

3. *Joseph Priestly*, D. D. History of the Corruptions of Christianity, vol. I. pp. 88—161. ed. Boston 1797. "*This work from the name of the author, has obtained more notice than, from its superficial contents and the every where visible ignorance of the sources of history, it deserves.*" *Münscher*, Dogmengesch, Einleitung, § 21.

4. *W. C. L. Ziegler*, Historia Dogmatis de Redemptione, Gotting. 1791, also in Commentt. Theol. vol. V. pp. 227—299. 8vo.—*good.*

5. *W. Münscher*, Handbuch der Christ. Dogmengeschichte, B. II. S. 204—262, and B. IV. S. 26[illegible]—319, 8vo. Marpurg, 1809. *This brings the history down to A. D.* 600, *in a very satisfactory manner.*

Appendix B.

Much of the obscurity and difficulty attending the doctrine of the atonement, arise, I conceive, from confounding the different meanings of the word justice. It will not then be unsuitable to give a distinct account of the authorized senses of this word, so far as they relate to the subject before us.

The *holiness* of God is his absolute moral perfection, or the sum

of his moral attributes viewed merely as attributes. His *righteousness* is nothing more than the display of his holiness or moral perfection, in his conduct towards his creatures. / See *Brettschneider's* Handbuch der Dogm. I. S. 347, and *Döderlein*, Theol. Christ. § 93. obs. 5. vol. I. p. 333.—The word *justice* has several meanings. Sometimes it is synonymous with righteousness. In this acceptation it is called *general justice ;* to distinguish it from the other acceptations, in which it is called *particular* or *simple justice.* General justice has respect to *all* the laws which ought to govern our conduct, and includes the whole list of moral virtues. *Particular* justice has respect only to the claims of others upon us, and consists in giving to every one his due.—The distinction has been explained by a recurrence to the doctrine of perfect and imperfect rights. A *perfect right* is that which persons have to things properly their own ; and to give them possession of which is conferring on them no favour, but merely discharging a debt. It is a right which a man may challenge, and which the law does, or should, always help him to recover. Such are the rights of a man to his property, to protection from oppression and injury, to acquittal when proved innocent, to the fulfilment of all contracts and promises made to him. An *imperfect right* is that which a beggar has to charity, and which every man has to kind offices according to his necessities ; a right however, which he can never challenge or enforce, and the recognition of which brings him under an obligation of gratitude to a benefactor. Now *general justice* regards *all* the rights of others, whether perfect or imperfect. It consists in allowing due influence to all the considerations which ought to govern our conduct. It involves the exercise of various virtues at the same time, or in the same act ; and is on that account, sometimes called *mixed justice. Particular* or *simple justice* consists in violating no man's perfect rights, or in satisfying all his just claims upon us ; "Justitia in suo cuique tribuendo cernitur." Simple justice is commonly divided into *distributive* and *commutative* justice. The former is concerned in the distribution of honours and privileges or burdens and services, among the members of a society. It is peculiarly the virtue of a governour or public officer. It requires him to observe equality in the distribution of rewards and punishments, privileges and burdens, paying regard only to the condition and the merits of each individual. The latter, commutative justice, respects merely compacts and bargains about property and services. It requires equality in the things commuted, or

that an exact equivalent be given for what is received, without any regard to persons or characters.—To these three kinds of justice, some add what is called *regal* or *rectoral* justice, which requires the governing power or sovereign of a realm to make such enactments and so to relax, modify or suspend the execution of the law, as to secure the highest good of the community, in cases where the ordinary course of distributive justice would be injurious and therefore wrong. But this need not be made a distinct species of justice, since it is in its nature nothing different from general justice. I mention it here only because it occurs in some treatises on the atonement.—The threefold division of justice stated above, whether it be the best that can be devised or not, has been generally received ever since the days of Aristotle, and is that to which moralists and others most commonly refer. See *Dwight's* Theol. Serm. x. vol. I. pp. 160—163, and *Grove's* Moral Phil. vol. II. pp. 238—244, 254—256, and the writers there referred to.

In treating of the justice of God, divines are accustomed to discriminate only two forms of it, *legislative* and *executive;* the former concerned in the enactment of laws, and the latter in the execution of them.—*Commutative* justice can hardly be predicated of God, as he is a being who gives to all but receives from none. *Distributive* justice, it would seem, may be predicated of him, and that too of the highest kind; because all his laws are equal, and their execution impartial. And yet we cannot suppose a being of such consummate perfection as he is, ever to perform any act without a due regard to *all* the rights of his creatures, and allowing due influence to *all* the considerations which ought to govern his conduct. But this would bring every act of justice performed by him completely under the definition of *general* justice. Shall we then say that distributive justice is not an attribute of God? By no means. But we must say, that distributive justice in him, is not that limited, one-eyed virtue which it often is in men, and which the common definition makes it; that is, it does not regard merely the *claims* of his creature, upon him. It is in the nature of it general justice presiding in the enactment and execution of permanent laws. In his permanent enactments, and in the ordinary execution of law, he does indeed give to every one his due, though from other considerations superadded to that of their deserts or claims; but in mercifully suspending the arm of punitive justice, in extraordinary enactments for

the sake of greater good than could be obtained by the mere execution of permanent laws,—in a word, in the formation and execution of the whole system of grace,—the justice which is diplayed is not distributive justice, even that elevated kind of it which we ascribe to God ; it is unequivocally *general justice.*

For these reasons, I do not hesitate to say, that *δικαιοσυνη* in Rom. iii. 24, is *general*, not distributive, *justice.* And to be consistent, every one must admit it, who admits that the justice of God in any sense of the word, is here intended ; and at the same time admits that the penalty of the law was not actually and literally executed on Jesus Christ substituted for us and charged with all our guilt.—See the younger Pres. *Edwards*, Three Serm. in Selections on the atonement, pp. 351—358. Pres. *Maxcy*, Discourses, Ibid. pp. 205—208. *Burge*, on Atonement, pp. 161—165. *Parkhurst*, Gr. Lex. *δικαιοσυνη*, and *Nares*, Remarks on Version of N. T. p. 160.

Appendix, C. p. 19.

For arguments in support of the doctrine of legal satisfaction by vicarious punishment, see *Grotius*, Defensio F. C. de Satisfactione, cap. IV. Op. tom. III. pp 311—315. *F. Turrettin*, de Satisfactione Christi, Disp. II. § 35—50. pp. 50—59, and Disp. X. *A. Fuller's* Dialogues, Pt. III. Convers. I, II, and, The Doctrine of the Aton. explained and defended, by *a Christian of the ancient School*, in Panoplist, Vol. II. pp. 453, 513, 560, and Vol. III. pp. 114, 155. Arguments against legal satisfaction by vicarious punishment, may be seen in *J. Balguy's* Essay on Redemption, pp. 12—23, ed. 1785. *E. D. Griffin*, on the Extent of the Aton. Pt. I. ch. 7. pp. 113—171. *C. Burge*, Essay on Aton. ch. 6 and 7, particularly ch. 7, pp. 195—216.

This subject has, I conceive, been embarrassed chiefly, by the general prevalence of the old scholastic notions respecting the transferable character of guilt and punishment, and by reasoning from the analogy of human governments without discriminating between acts of sovereignty and the mere execution of law.—From the days of Anselm and Aquinas, or from the eleventh century to the eighteenth, the great body of Western christians believed that the Mediator so took the place of transgressors, or at least of penitent believing ones, that their guilt was either actually transferred or legally imputed to him ; and that he of course became legally obnoxious to punishment, and really suffered the curse of the law or what was equivalent to it. The reformers generally, and most of

their successors till some time in the last century, held these sentiments. After the impossibility of transferring moral character or guilt and obedience, began to be seen ; the legal imputation of it, or the justice of treating persons as if such a transfer had really taken place, was tenaciously held by some ; while others discriminated between guilt and punishment, and held to the transfer of the latter only. All these, more or less overlooked the nature of the penalty of the divine law ; and confounded the ideas of forfeiture and of simple punishment. They considered the transgressor as bound to *pay* something ; and supposed that the payment of the forfeiture, whether by himself or by another, satisfied the demands of the law. And when reasoning on the subject, they drew analogies from the proceedings in human governments, without discriminating between acts of sovereignty and the mere execution of law ; or if they saw and admitted the distinction, as many of them did, yet they did not conform their language to it, but continued to use the terms *law*, *satisfaction*, *legal justice*, &c. in the customary vague manner. From this source, so much obscurity and misunderstanding have arisen, that it may not be improper just to state in few words the distinction, which should never have been neglected. The supreme power in a nation, not only enacts and repeals the laws of the country, but it sometimes grants dispensations, or suspends and modifies the operation of the existing laws ; by forbidding prosecutions, remitting penalties and granting pardons, in criminal cases ; and by allowing of chancery proceedings in some civil causes. From the imperfection of all human legislation, occasions will arise when the public good will be promoted, and more perfect justice be done to individuals, by suspending the regular course of legal justice ; and the more imperfect the laws, the more frequent these occasions. But it is only the sovereign of the nation, or some one possessing a portion of his power, that can meet the exigences of these cases ; the judges and all the ordinary ministers of justice are bound to follow strictly the course the law prescribes. They are not to be guided by their own wisdom and judgment, or by their own ideas of what is reasonable and proper, except where the laws expressly give them discretionary power. The law is their rule, so far as it extends ; and within those limits, legal justice is the only justice they are to know. Now it is with reference to the exercise of legal justice in a criminal trial, that we speak of a legal justification, or a justification on the ground of law and justice. In this, which is doubtless the proper sense of

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the words, we affirm that the justification of believers in Jesus Christ, does not proceed on the ground of law and justice; that the divine law did not allow of a transfer of our punishment to him, nor permit his sufferings to be set to our account; and that nothing the Mediator could possibly do or suffer, would satisfy the demands of the law upon us. And this we say is evident from the nature of law, in all governments, human and divine. Hence we pronounce the justification of believers, to be an act of the sovereign mercy of God, a departure from the regular course of justice, and such a departure as leaves the claims of the law forever unsatisfied. We mean that it is analogous to those sovereign acts of the supreme power in a nation, by which the regular course of legal justice is arrested; and that it is such an act as the ministers of legal justice could not perform.—Overlooking this distinction, or confounding all the acts of human rulers, many writers on the atonement, finding that in human governments much use is made of discretionary power; and that in the early ages especially, magistrates followed very much their own discretion or rather caprice, in the administration of justice; have been led to consider the justification of believers in Christ as a judicial act or the act of a judge seated on the bench of justice. The judge, say they, saw in the vicarious sufferings of the Mediator, a full satisfaction of all the demands of the divine law; and therefore he pronounced us legally acquitted. These writers could find, especially in ancient history, some instances of human rulers allowing and even requiring the innocent to suffer for the guilty: and these were deemed examples in point. They found all antiquity admiring the ingenuity and extolling the virtue of some such rulers: and this was evidence that the common sense of mankind approved such justice. They could see and feel that the occasional exercise of sovereign or discretionary power, suspending or modifying the operation of human laws, is really necessary; and this satisfied their consciences, their moral sense, that strict justice might require or at least admit a similar power to interpose and modify the operations of the divine law: for in their zeal for a favourite opinion, they unhappily forgot that the law of God as administered by him, can never fail to do perfect justice, and that any suspension of its operation would of course be a suspension of justice.